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Is Ford Really Serious?

By James Reston

WASHINGTON—At the end of the Helsinki "summit" conference, which was billed as the most spectacular gathering of world leaders since the Congress of Vienna, the main story in The New York Times was that the New York subway fare was going up to fifty cents, and the top headlines in The Boston Globe were that Turkey had turned down a \$50-million handout from the United States, and the Boston Red Sox had won a double-header.

This tells us something about the modern world. The fear of a major world war is no longer the dominating force in people's minds. They apparently are pleased to see by-satellite television their political leaders getting out of limousines and smiling through swinging doors, and talking about

countries of Japan and Germany, unless it intended to encircle and destroy the Soviet Union.

Some progress has obviously been made in East-West relations as a result of all this. There were only twenty years of peace between the end of the First World War in 1919 and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939, and gradually Washington and Moscow have begun to talk about avoiding wars and reducing arms; but at the Helsinki conference, it was clear that concessions were made again primarily by the United States and not by the Soviet Union.

In the last couple of years, the United States has pulled out of Southeast Asia, agreed at Helsinki that the geographical frontiers of Eastern Europe — imposed by Soviet military power — should be "inviolable," rejected Israel's military conquest of Arab territory, and voted to end the economic embargo on Cuba.

Moscow's response to these practical concessions has merely been to renew in the spectacularly vague and ambiguous promises of the Helsinki communiqué what it promised and repudiated in the United Nations Charter, and it is only fair to insist, as President Ford and Prime Minister Wilson of Britain suggested at Helsinki, that Moscow keep its promises.

Specifically, on the promise not to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, will the Soviet Union now cooperate for peace in Portugal and the Middle East? The basis of "détentes" has been that the strategic status quo should be maintained, but Moscow is still insisting that the West should not intervene in the internal affairs of Eastern Europe, while Moscow is still free to finance the Communist forces in Portugal and perpetuate the Middle East turmoil.

President Ford has gone along with this one-sided game, apparently in the belief that if he agrees that the frontiers in Eastern Europe are "inviolable," the Soviet Union will agree that human rights and internal affairs are also inviolable. But this compromise, which should probably have been arranged before Helsinki, now has to be tested after Brezhnev has gotten the border agreements he wanted most.

Consequently, it will be interesting to see how Mr. Ford does with this problem. He has obviously gained politically at home by all those satellite pictures of meetings with Messrs. Brezhnev, Schmidt and Wilson.

He insisted in Helsinki that the test was not the promises made there but the promises kept, and this, he said, could be decided only in the future. But in Portugal, and in the Middle East, the future is now, and the question is whether Messrs. Ford and Kissinger can make the Helsinki principles prevail in Lisbon, Cairo and Tel Aviv.

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peace rather than war, but they are more interested in jobs, prices, and other tangible things nearer home.

So it is easy to be skeptical and even cynical about the noble principles of the Helsinki summit conference. They were little more than a repetition of the promises of the United Nations Charter, which have been ignored and violated for more than a generation; but probably there is nothing wrong in repeating them now, and they can be put to the test in an atmosphere that is quite different from the mood of the 1945 San Francisco conference.

The immediate test lies in Portugal and the Middle East. The "spirit of Helsinki," like the "spirit of Camp David," under President Eisenhower and the "spirit of Glassboro, N.J.", under President Johnson, was that the big powers should forget the past and work together for a new world order; but the atmosphere of suspicion is almost as great now as it was in 1945.

At that time, the Soviet Union was suffering from the effects of the most savage war in history, with tens of millions of its people killed and most of its industrial plant destroyed. It was living under the domination of fear, and determined to believe that the U.S. was bent on its destruction.

The tragedy of these last years of the third quarter of the century is that the Soviet Union consistently misjudged the mind and policy of America. It simply could not believe that the United States, with a monopoly of atomic weapons, would not keep on producing them. (After the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, Washington's stockpile, despite its monopoly, was exactly zero.) Moscow could not understand that the most powerful nation in the world would rebuild the enemy

